

Foreword by John McDonnell MP

This history of the Labour Party is written at a time when the whole question of whether the Party can play any role in the development of socialism in Britain is once again being openly debated on the left.

For many the Labour Party has become irretrievably captured by a neo-conservative clique which has effectively transformed its constitutional objectives, its democratic structures and its policy programme into nothing more than a vehicle for the political representation of capital.

Undoubtedly all the evidence of the last decade demonstrates that the New Labour project has sought step by step to deconstruct the party and prevent any return to Labour serving as the agent of radical change in the distribution of wealth and power in our country and globally.

This trend is part of the dynamic of globalisation, which demands political structures to facilitate the compliant expansion of markets into the previously no go areas of public services at home and the intensification of profitmaking exploitation abroad.

The ideal type of governmental and political structure for globalised capital is the US model of Democrat and Republican parties: parties with no membership as such; simply supporters with no role in policy making or in holding elected representatives to account. Supporters recruited solely to "get out the vote" at elections and ensure the rotation in power of the political elites.

This historical analysis of the Labour Party demonstrates that the party from its very inception has always been a terrain of struggle between the different forces that make up the labour and trade union movement. At varying times a fierce debate between socialists and social reformers, between economic trade unionism and political trade unionism and even between revolutionaries and reformists.

Labour in government has reflected at different times in its history the fortunes of the different elements engaged in this struggle within the movement. The struggle has always been rumbustuous, with strident debate, electoral manoeuvring, backroom fixes, and at times splits and expulsions. This is the contagious excitement of a political movement searching for its future. But whatever the heat generated in the debate between the counterposing viewpoints, all participants based their arguments on the acceptance of the role of the Party as the voice of the labour and progressive movement in Britain.

Today's struggle within the Labour Party and the wider trade union and progressive movement goes beyond those traditional confines. The battle within the Labour Party and within the trade union movement is not how the



John McDonnell MP
addresses the Labour
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Labour Party speaks and acts on behalf of our movement but more fundamentally whether in future it is capable of representing the movement at all.

A turning point has been reached. The period of New Labour may be seen in the future as a short deviation from the historical flow of the Labour Party as a developing socialist party or it may be identified as the period in which Labour as an aspiring party of radical socialist advance was destroyed.

As always the decision will be influenced partly by the economic and social climate in which we operate and, more importantly, by the conscious decision of socialists within our movement whether, in the words the right wing Gaitskell (of all people!), "to fight, fight and fight again for the party we love."

I will stand and fight.

John McDonnell MP

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and Socialist Campaign Group of MPs